

International Sunday School Lessons.

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Lesson 3.

April 18th.

THE FIRST MIRACLE.

John ii. 1-11. Golden Text, John ii. 11. Time, about A. D. 27. Place, Cana of Galilee Rulers, the same as the last lesson.

Jesus and His few followers have turned their backs upon John the Baptist and the vast assemblage at the Jordan ford, and they have gone northward to His Galilean home. Once more the animated scene on the shores of the Lake appears to view, and they are welcomed back again by relatives and friends. Into sympathetic ears is poured the wondrous recital of the events of the last few days. Always noted for His character and bearing amongst His associates; with the circumstances of His birth still treasured and hallowed amongst His loved ones; it now seemed as though He was indeed to be the Messiah of His people. When He reached His home He found that His mother had gone to a wedding at Cana, a few miles away. An Oriental is nothing if he is not hospitable, and Jesus and those who were with Him were invited to the feast as soon as their presence in the neighborhood was known. An Eastern wedding feast often lasts a week, and not only relatives and friends are invited, but ordinary passers by are frequently compelled to tarry long enough to drink the health of the bride and bridegroom. Not the liquor of today, but the pure juice of the grape. In its pure and original state it is commended in the Bible; when it got older and somewhat exhilarating it is not spoken of with disapproval; but when it became intoxicating, the Bible condemns it unsparingly. They had the juice of the grape at this feast, and as the number of guests considerably increased, it soon became apparent to Mary that the supply would run short. As a careful housewife she kept an observant eye on the surroundings, and perhaps assisted in the dispensation of hospitality. She had confidence in her son. Thirty years of patient watching and sweet companionship had taught her to place great reliance in Jesus. It was but natural under the circumstances, that she should now go to Him with the present difficulty, and tell Him the wine was running short. There is no evidence that she expected any such results as followed, and she learnt a lesson when Jesus said to her, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." Or more properly, "Lady, what is there to me and thee?" Let me alone, let me take my own way. "Mine hour is not yet come." He had passed out from under the maternal care and counsel, and from henceforth He was to obey only the voice of His Heavenly Father. Presently there was a murmur through the house. Guests called for wine, but the waiters had to tell them the unpleasant fact that it was all gone. This was considered a calamity at such a time, and we can scarcely conceive the chagrin of the host or the dissatisfaction of his guests. Comment was freely made. They began to censure the host for being such a careless provider; some doubtless thought about breaking up the festivities and going home. It was a moment of painful despair to the host—it was Christ's moment, His hour had come.

Standing at the door were several large earthen jars which contained water for the guests to wash in. This is common in the East. Every house had them. Being a wedding feast, there were a number of them in use on this occasion. Jesus comes forward unpretentiously out of the crowd and tells the servants to empty those jars and then fill them up with fresh water. Promptly his order is obeyed, though they know not the reason. While this is being rapidly done, the guests pay no attention to the proceedings. It is all completed, and there comes just then a new call for wine. Blank despair is on the face of him of whom the request is made, but Jesus tells him to draw from one of the water jars and take it to the master of ceremonies, whose duty it was to taste new lots of wine that were opened. The servant drew the water from the jar as commanded, and took the bowl to the ruler. As soon as his lips touched the

fragrant fluid he recognized it as the purest sweetest and richest wine he had ever tasted, and he was astonished. What did the host mean by preserving the best fruit of the vintage till the end of the feast. Usually, when men's palates were satiated with drinking, an inferior wine served their purpose. But here, at the close of the festivities, the host produces the best wine he has. So he argued, as he knew not whence the liquid came. He said it was wine: the servants *knew* it was water which they had themselves put into the jars. As it was then freely used by the assembled guests, it soon became known that pure water had, by some strange process, been changed into pure wine. And as the truth dawned upon them that the word of Jesus had produced the change, that His word had wrought a miracle, they recognized in Him a superior being; while His disciples, fresh from the impressive scenes at Jordan's ford, beheld in Him the Son of God.

LESSON THOUGHTS.

1. Man's extremity is God's opportunity.
2. Jesus always helps in time of need.
3. Not only invite Jesus to your home, but make him a constant dweller there.
4. As Christ can turn common water into a rich liquid, so he can transform the basest heart into a fit temple of the Holy Ghost.

Prayer on the Deep.

Perhaps no commander of an ocean steamer has been more widely and favorably known among Christians than the late Capt. J. E. Dutton, for a number of years commodore of the Allan Line of transatlantic steamers; he having crossed the Atlantic nearly four hundred times.

He was born in England, February 8, 1828, and brought up in New York, to which city his family removed. His health failing, he sailed to the Pacific in 1845, on a whaling voyage.

When off the coast of New Zealand he was convinced of sin by reading a tract, "The Swearer's Prayer," and immediately undertook to abandon the habit of profanity; but finding himself unable to reform in his own strength, he began to cry for mercy, and to seek salvation. There was no one on board who could direct him in the way of life, but he commenced to read the Bible and seek the Lord, and when alone at the mast-head at night, his cry was, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

At last the light of heaven broke upon him; he was a new man, and he began to teach transgressors the ways of the Lord, and to tell them what God had done for his soul. Some laughed and others scoffed, but he continued to bear his testimony, as a faithful witness should. Shortly afterward he met another Christian on board another ship, with whom he held sweet communion. Soon after, this man was drowned while catching a whale, and for two years after this, Dutton, in all his voyaging, never met a Christian, though he still persevered in the service of the Lord. He subsequently met some of the crew of the missionary brig "John Wesley," and afterward was able to lead some of his own shipmates to Christ.

He made progress in his profession, and became carpenter, mate, and in 1854 sailed from Ontario to London in command of the first ship ever built on the Canadian lakes; and the following year he joined the Allan Line, with which he continued till his death.

In 1860 he united with Dr. Andrew Bonar's church, and enjoyed the privilege of his luminous expositions of divine truth. He soon commenced to have daily Bible readings with his men on board his ship. This practice he kept up, usually having religious services every day while at sea; and when on shore he was largely engaged in evangelistic work.

To cross the Atlantic with Capt. Dutton was a privilege of which many evangelists and Christian workers availed themselves, and the opportunities for daily worship, reading of the Word, and prayer, were highly prized by the faithful.

During the autumn of 1877 Mr. George Muller was crossing the Atlantic with him. One day the steamer entered a dense fog, and they were obliged to slacken speed, as they were in the vicinity of icebergs, and great caution was demanded. About

noon Mr. Muller asked Capt. Dutton if he had a few minutes to spare for prayer. They retired together into a room, kneeled down, and Mr Muller prayed to God, their loving and Almighty Father, to remove the fog for the sake of his dear Son, Jesus Christ; and in his prayer he expressed a confident trust that God would grant the request. Within five minutes the fog had vanished, and the vessel was able to proceed at full speed.

Though we never had the privilege of crossing the Atlantic with Capt. Dutton, yet we remember a Sunday morning's visit to the charter room of the "Sardinian" when it was lying in East Boston. Around the little room were nautical charts, cases of Bibles, Concordances, and other Biblical works. In the centre of the table, and around this, closely packed, were some eighteen or twenty bronzed and weather beaten sailors, who on the morning of the first day of the week, like the Christians of old, came together to break bread. It was an hour of blessing, and when it was over the captain was ready to go the rounds of the churches and missions, wherever the way was open, and preach among the people the unsearchable riches of Christ.

On board his ship he also held meetings as he had opportunity in the steerage, and it is said that as many as thirty souls have thus been saved on a single passage. In port he preached the gospel, gave lectures on the Tabernacle, held Bible readings, attended union meetings, and was always abounding in the work of the Lord. He was a diligent student of the Scriptures, and his little chart-room was also a Bible depository, from which many copies of the sacred Word were scattered among those who had need of them.

The last time we met Capt. Dutton was in Portland, Me., where he attended a meeting at a mission opened by Mrs. A. E. Smith, and embraced an opportunity which was offered to sing a song of Zion, and bear testimony to the grace and goodness of God. Not long after, we heard of his death. He had been ailing for some months, and after resting and traveling for a while, had returned to take command of his vessel; he made one voyage, and died of Bright's disease, at Montreal, where he was buried with honors befitting his station, by the side of his parents, in the cemetery of Mount Royal. He was beloved by all, and though the profane and careless would sometimes speak lightly of "Holy Joe," yet in storm or danger they knew of no man in whom they had greater confidence. Said an officer of the Allan Fleet, who had known him long, to the writer, "I never saw a man who could handle a vessel like Capt. Dutton." His earnest, energetic words, on land and sea, will linger long in many a devout and loving heart, and one of the pleasures of the great Beyond, will be to greet such men as he "beyond the river, where the surges cease to roll."

"There all the ship's company meet,
Who sailed with the Saviour beneath;
With shouting each other they greet,
And triumph o'er trouble and death."

Questions for a Church Member.

Do you ever tell what the Lord has done for your soul? How does the world know you are a Christian? Do you ever make a personal appeal to an unconverted soul? Do your religious engagements take precedence over all others? Have you tried to induce any one to attend church? Have you welcomed a stranger in church? Do you visit the poor, the sick, and strangers? Have you sought to know our new members? Do you "go into all the world and preach the gospel," by giving as the Lord has prospered you? Is secret prayer your daily habit? Are you informed concerning the spread of the gospel? Do you take a religious paper? Are you an advocate of gospel temperance principles? Do you observe family worship? Do you ever hand any person a good book or tract? Do you contribute your part of the current expenses of the church? Are any of the ways of working and witnessing for Christ your ways?—DR. G. L. SPINING.

Satan selects his disciples when they are idle, but Christ chose His while they were busy at work, either mending their nets or casting them into the sea.—FARNDON.